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ENGL 864 Abstract

**Depression and Daddy Issues: The Function of the Melancholy in Two Nineteenth-Century British Novels**

In this paper, I pose that melancholy in the 19th century British novel can be read as both symptomatic of and reactionary against repressive patriarchal ideologies. To illustrate this phenomenon, I use the Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Germaine deStael’s *Corinne, or Italy* as primary texts for analysis. These novels provide strong examples of melancholy characters of both genders, and I argue that the nature of their melancholy is tied to the ways in which they are oppressed. My argument is also informed by scholarship that has developed definitions of melancholy and explored issues of patriarchal repression in relation to the historical period with which I am concerned.

My analyses are founded upon establishing the presence of patriarchal ideologies within the interior world of the novels, as well as defining melancholy in a way that emphasizes its connection to suffering. This framework allows Corinne, Oswald, and Victor to be, first and foremost, identified as melancholy characters, and then analyzed in terms of how they have been oppressed by the patriarchal ideologies at play. This allows for an understanding of melancholy that defines it not simply as a decline, but also as a revolutionary state.

The fact that both representations of patriarchal ideologies and melancholy are not unique to the works of Shelley and de Stael allow for further implications in relation to this argument. Because these elements are present in many nineteenth century British novels, the assertions made in this paper suggest relevance beyond the texts analyzed.